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By Joe Byerly

Recently several lieutenants have written me to share their fears and anxieties about their own particular development as the tectonic plates of the Army and budgets continue to shift. In their eyes, their experience as a junior officer will be characterized by garrison administration, episodic training events, and canceled rotations to the National Training Center. Their fear is that by the time they make it to company command and beyond, they will not possess the necessary tools required of them to be effective commanders. They won't be ready.

I do my best in my correspondence to not only give them a space to vent, but to also offer them words of encouragement about the future. I usually redirect the conversation towards the idea of being a military professional. Without echoing the definitions of Huntington or Janowitz, I would like to take this opportunity to address some of the junior officers who might be feeling the same anxieties and fears as those with whom I've come into contact with lately.

Being a military professional does not mean waiting for the system to develop you. It means taking charge of your own development and seeking out opportunities to make yourself a better leader. It is our responsibility to those that we might lead in future assignments to be prepared when the time comes, regardless of the opportunities that are presented to us by the military. In an ideal world, we would have unlimited training budgets, the perfect balance of field time and family time, and all officers would feel like they are fully prepared for the next level of leadership. We must come to terms with reality and although lacking hands-on practical experience, we must turn to history and other professional literature to develop and mature our own understanding of the profession of arms.

History is ripe with [examples](#) of military leaders who have faced similar difficulties, but they compensated for their lack of experience with a practice of self-study. Generals George Patton and Dwight Eisenhower as well as the majority of the leaders in the Second World War spent their formative years developing in an environment characterized by the following passage:

“It is terribly difficult for military men to keep their methods adapted to rapidly changing times. Between wars the military business slumps. Our people lose interest. Congress concerns itself with cutting the Army than with building it up. And the troops...find a large part of their time and energy taken up with caring for buildings, grounds, and other impedimenta. In view of all the inertias to be overcome, and in view of the fact that our lives and honor are not in peril from outside aggression, it is not likely that our Army is going to be kept to an up-to-the-minute state of preparedness.” -William E. Lassiter, 1929

I encourage young officers to read Roger H. Nye’s book, [The Patton Mind: The Professional Development of an Extraordinary Leader](#), (a very quick read) to see how George Patton approached his personal growth as an officer. Also, read Robert Carroll’s [The Making of a Leader: Dwight D. Eisenhower](#), an article in Military Review, which describes the career path of a young officer who missed out on combat experience in World War I. Both of these pieces may provide inspiration to those struggling right now as many units adjust to garrison life. They also give us insight as to how these leaders prepared themselves for their future roles in combat.

More recently, General (ret) Paul K. Van Riper’s essay, [The Relevance of History to the Military Profession: An American Marine’s View](#), describes how reading prepared him for leadership roles in combat and in garrison, and how returning to previously read material at different stages in his career helped him in making sense of his experiences.

In addition to the works mentioned above, read military blogs such as 3×5 Leadership, Company and Field Grade Leader, and The Military Leader. These provide officers with a wealth of practical knowledge.

Globalization, rapid-advances in information and communication technology, the rise of ethnic nationalism, the diffusion of military technologies to non-state actors, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has complicated the current landscape. The future is uncertain. None of us know, much like the young lieutenants and captains during the interwar period, when we might be called upon to lead our nation’s men and women in conflict. We owe it to our Soldiers and our nation to begin preparing our minds now, so that when the day comes we are ready.

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